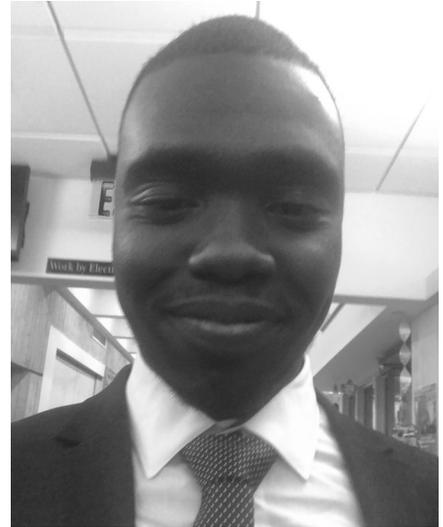


MEOA 2017-2018 Scholarship Winners

Adam Abdelrahman

Holyoke Community College
Student Support Services

I came to the United States as a refugee from Cairo, Egypt. The war devastated my home; my family members and I were forced to live in a refugee camp in Darfur. I lost much of my family in the camp from sickness and stray bullets. My mother, my younger siblings, and I lived in the refugee camp for 7 years alone with my grandmother. Four of my siblings were born in the refugee camp in very bad conditions. Some of my tribe members who survived the attacks lived in the refugee camp with us as well. My father was often in jail because he helped other villages to go to refugee camps. The Sudanese military did not like that because they were the ones killing us, and they did not wish safety for anyone. I finished my 1st year of high school in Darfur, and my father helped us leave. We escaped the refugee camp not knowing whether we would make it out alive. Even though we were sitting right next to each other, we had to say goodbye to one another in case we got killed by the Janjaweed and the Sudanese military.



After three weeks moving from one vehicle to another, we reached Al Khartoum alive but very sick. We met a man from Darfur who gave us a small room in his mosque to stay in for a month until my father came and got us our passports. The United Nations office in Cairo welcomed us, gave us a place to stay, and put my siblings and I in school. My mother could not have been happier because her children were safe and going to school! I finished high school at 15 because I scored high in the Egyptians national exam. After I finished high school, I got a job with the U.N. interviewing young refugee children like myself because they would not talk to the adults. The United Nations Office in Cairo saw how easy it was for refugee children talking to other refugee children like them, so 6 others and myself were chosen from 150 kids to work for the U.N.

Finally, we were settled in the U.S. by the U.N. I did not speak any English, and it took me five months to learn the language. I joined a theater group called the Performance Project. I told my stories on stage with my theater group, and I met people with similar experiences. Most of us were refugees. Six months later I took ESL classes at Holyoke Community College to further pursue my education. I am majoring in Criminal Justice because my dream is to work for the FBI and prevent terrorism. I also want to give back to America and thank the American people for having my family in their country. My family and I are thankful for our education, health, and safety.

At HCC I am on the Dean's list, a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, a New Student Orientation Leader, Student Senator, ALANA member, and a SSS mentor. I also use my bilingual skills to work for the ESL office, translating Arabic to English and 4 others that I speak. I am involved in several clubs including the International Students Club, the Dancing Club, and the ESport Club. I also volunteer to teach basic English class at the Islamic Mosque of Western Massachusetts to refugees and newcomers.

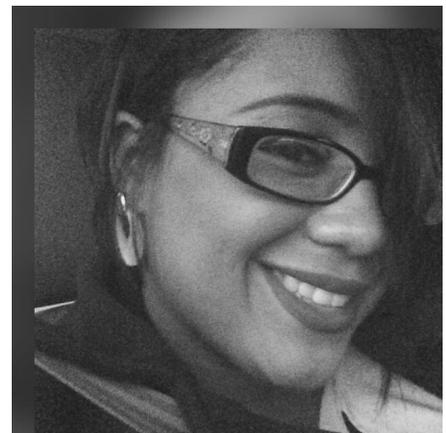
Education is very important in my house. My mother always tells us that education is important and without it, we would not have peace. I do not want to see anyone go through the hardship that I went through. More importantly, I do not need to see anyone lose their loved ones because of war.

My goal is to graduate from HCC and go to Northeastern University to further my education and obtain my bachelors degree in Criminal Justice and International Affairs. I also have an interest in International Law. Going to Northeastern and being in the Boston area would allow me the opportunity to hopefully obtain an internship with the FBI. A scholarship from MEOA would allow me to further my education and accomplish these goals. I currently get support from financial aid, and I've also been awarded a few scholarships in the past two years that have helped me to get to this point on my educational journey. My family and I also get support from food stamps. Therefore, receiving this scholarship would definitely be a great help toward achieving my academic goals and help me further my education at Northeastern University.

Francis Marlene Herrand Sanchez

Northern Essex Community College
Student Support Services

I arrived in the USA in 1998 at six years of age. My mother had worked for two years to bring my brother and myself here; this way we would have a better future. My mother has always been my inspiration and motivation. Once I graduated high school, I took the opportunity to help my mother financially. Instead of going to college, I took a brief course and began working as a CNA. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I could never cover it financially by myself. While working as a CNA, I had to work full time plus overtime, just to make ends meet. Working so many hours a week, attending classes, getting my course work done, and covering the cost on my own, it was a daunting thought. There was no way I could possibly make that happen. Still, I made it a personal goal to return to college at some point and finish my degree. I took the decision to move back with my family in order to cut down on certain costs and expenses, and I began to attend Northern Essex Community College the summer of 2017.



After I graduated high school, I started to learn American Sign Language; my interest began because I lived close to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. One year after I started to learn ASL, I noticed the need for advocacy and alliance with the Deaf and Hearing communities. I took the necessary steps and decided to move back to my native land, the Dominican Republic, to volunteer for the deaf. I knew of the need for help within the Deaf community because my uncle by marriage is Deaf and Blind. The sign language used in the D.R. is ASL and deaf education is scarce. I lived there for about two years, going into remote villages near the city to teach deaf children ASL and basic communication skills. A major part of this volunteer work was educating parents and neighbors of the deaf children what it really means to be deaf. Due to lack of education, even for the hearing family members, and resources in these areas, people did not understand what being deaf meant. Most people believed that being deaf meant you were crazy or demon possessed. Many families would abandon their deaf members or leave them tied up in the house like a dog. This was a belief and understanding that had to be corrected. Even down to this day, this perception has improved, but it is still the thought of many on the island.

While living in the D.R., I was able to work online as a sales representative over the phone, although the job did not pay well, it allowed me to live on the island continuously with food and a roof over my head. Unfortunately, after two years, I had to come back to the U.S. to help my family during economically difficult times. When I came back, I decided I would finish my education and be able to return to D.R. or anywhere wherein minority communities needed support.

I remember when I was in high school, I was unable to keep up with my workload and graduated with a very low GPA score. I always knew that when I came back to college I would work hard to graduate with a better GPA. Currently my GPA is a 3.87 and I have been able to take an Honors course at the college. I have really been able to prove to myself that I can achieve and maintain academic excellence. I struggled in the past with keeping up with all my responsibilities as a student, daughter and trying to have an active social life. I feel that because of my immaturity at the time, my grades and academic standing suffered greatly. Having the opportunity of going back to college and improve my standing has really shown me that I have been able to in both maturity and intelligence.

My final goal is to become a multilingual interpreter. I have been interpreting for my family since I was a child. Being able to help others through this skill is rewarding to me. I would like to obtain my Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Language and continue to add to the languages I can interpret to and from. With the MEOA Scholarship I would be able to pay for the necessary materials needed for the courses I take. Perhaps 40% of my college education costs are due to textbooks and different materials needed to complete the coursework. Textbooks only can range \$100-150 and when you add the cost of tuition and fees, it can range anywhere between \$4,000-6,000. With the MEOA Scholarship I can pay for my tuition and fees and, if any surplus, I can buy textbooks needed for classes.

I currently work as a Certified Medical Interpreter in Spanish on a part-time basis to help around my home and cover additional college costs. For the academic year of 2018-2019, I have not been offered financial assistance through the Pell Grant and Federal SEOG, although I do expect this to change. Based on my Pell grant from the 2016-2017 academic year, I will be receiving around \$3000 in assistance. I am hoping to receive at least one other scholarship through NECC for the total amount of \$500. If I receive the MEOA Scholarship, I would be able to fully cover my tuition and fees for at least one semester of the year. I look forward to a future where I will have the ability of bringing people of different languages and cultures together. I know if I receive the MEOA Scholarship, I will get one step closer to making that truly happen.

Think Huynh

You Inc- Bruce Wells Scholars
Upward Bound

Not growing up in a wealthy family helps me appreciate the things I have. Looking back at my life in Vietnam, I remember the rice farm, our little hut with its clay walls, and our twenty year old motorbike. School was never a topic of discussion in my family. At the age of five, rather than playing with friends, I befriended the buffaloes that we kept to plough the paddies. Living without a father in the household chained me to such responsibilities.



I would always get up at the crack of dawn to feed the buffaloes. In the afternoon, I would drag the buffaloes out of their pens and take them to the river to bathe. Once they were done, it'd be another fight entirely as I'd yank and tug the stubborn buffaloes back to their pens. Half of my life barreled by spending days like this.

It was in the midst of this cycle of life, during a regular family dinner, that my mom suddenly brought up school— a word that excruciates fear to all farm boys. School meant starting a new life, one without free time to be with my family. I began first grade knowing absolutely nothing about the Vietnamese alphabet. My family couldn't afford to send me to preschool so I barely knew how to write basic words such as, "hi" and "bye."

The thought of dropping out of school always weighed on my mind, but I would remember how my mom put her immense back-breaking effort into making enough money to pay my school fees. Despite this, in sixth grade, I failed both my math and Vietnamese classes. When I told her, she looked at me with eyes full of tears as if I had ripped her heart out. All I could feel was a terrible sense of guilt.

After that moment, I sought my teacher for help. Everyday after school, I worked with my teacher, completely focused on grasping my homework. My efforts eventually paid off and cleared the fog in my eyes to unveil a new world. Once my midterm came out, I discovered that I obtained straight A's in every core class. When my mom saw my report card, the look in her eyes made all the late nights and hours after school worth it. This was the first time since starting school that I was truly grateful for all the time and effort I had put in.

However, I did not get the chance to bask in this enlightenment. All of a sudden my mom introduced the prospects of the "American Dream." If my family, as poverty stricken as it was, had the ability to migrate, then didn't it mean this opportunity was easily obtainable by everyone? What was so special? I now undertook the journey of adjusting to a different country. My mom and brother once again drowned themselves in work and as a result, I was alone in this dark and unfamiliar county. My uncle, a motor mechanic, saw how depressed I was and took a shot at bringing me out of my misery. With a broken boat motor, he took me outside and taught me how each component of the motor functioned. Each day, I was pushed to fix that motor through the lead of my uncle. A kid who used to have no motivation now spent more than two hours after school working on what cultivated into a hobby I was pulled out of the dark once I found a passion that helped me get through loneliness. This passion presented me a purpose to work hard for the past six years, which is going to one of the top engineering schools in the nation. Mechanics was just like piecing a puzzle together. If one component fails, I'd try another possible solution, and one day that last piece of the puzzle will be placed where it belongs.

My proudest volunteer commitment up to date is for my cross country team at South High. I started off my Freshman year as one of the slowest runners on the team with a 5k personal record of thirty-eight minutes. By the end of the year, I received a trophy for "the most improved runner" that season. Sadly, I ended the season with several injuries from shin splints to an IT band inflammation. Luckily, my coach offered me a manager position which allowed me to be there for the team every practice. Timing them every race, I was able to cheer everyone on when they were close to beating the opponents. The feeling of being a part of this big and hard working family made me feel beyond happy as I got to see the teammates I used to run with break their own records. I tried running again my Junior year but ended up with more injuries so I decided to continue volunteering to help the team. I have now achieved more than eighty hours of volunteering from cross country.

In addition to this, I decided to challenge myself with the highest tier of classes available throughout high school. I began to take AP Human Geography as a Freshman despite barely knowing any English. This class was labor intensive and I had to work harder than other native students who understood the English language perfectly; in the end allowing me to learn how to read English better and comprehend more. As a result, I ended up receiving a score of 4 out of 5 on the AP exam. This experience led me to take 11 AP classes in total throughout high school. My grit and work ethic bore fruit where just last year I was awarded the Rensselaer Medal, a \$25,000 renewable scholarship at that institution for 4 years. Receiving such a prestigious scholarship from one of the most well known Engineering institutions in America made me realize that hard work really pays off in the end. Unfortunately, after getting accepted into Rensselaer the scholarship was still not enough to make it affordable.

In the next four years of college, I plan to attend UMass Lowell and study Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in Mechatronics. As an athlete who spent most of his time on the bench due to injuries, I want to be able to help make prosthetic parts and assist those in similar or worse conditions than me. Textbooks now could cost nearly \$1000 per year and that amount is just not attainable with the help of my low income single mother who is the head of the household. We therefore cannot afford to take on the burden of taking out loans from private parties for my \$11,000 gap. I have been lucky enough to receive a \$1000 scholarship from the Webster Square Business Association which will be awarded to me this summer. With the help of the Federal Loan, that gap is brought down to about \$4,500, not including the extra expenses in meal plan and room and board. With MEOA's help, I may be able to cut down on the cost of books. In order for me to start building prosthetic products, I have to be able to be in as little debt as possible so I can start using the money I make toward building little projects that can be helpful to people.

Steven Robles

You-Inc Bruce Wells Scholars
Upward Bound



Writing this essay on the last day of school, I can really look back and recount these past four years of my life. Filled with twists and turns, bumps and bruises, I have made my high school experience one to be proud of. I have battled many tough times and prevailed nonetheless. I've participated in activities that benefited my community and myself. I've been regarded as a leader and a top student in my class for as long as I can remember due to my academic success and character. I am extraordinarily goal-oriented and my most prominent and imminent goal is to go to college. As a first generation student, my path isn't as clear as it would be for others and I will be taking it without the help of my parents. They, while they have done the best they could have raising me, can't give me the answers for this next step and can not provide financial support to pay for college either so this scholarship is very important to me.

When I was a freshman, my parents got divorced. For many, this would be a devastating event to occur for someone just entering high school but it didn't really bother me at all. I thought that it wouldn't affect me enough to change who I was but I was unaware of how it would affect my parents. My mom got a lot colder and we got distant. My father got depressed and he got much closer to alcohol rather than his family. His alcoholism pushed him lower than I've ever seen someone to the point where he didn't leave his room, lost his job, cried daily, and even attempted to commit suicide. This made my home feel like I had lost the things that made my home a home.

When I was a junior, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. The thought of losing her made me cry for days on end. She was operated on and gratefully beat it but she has been in bed rest ever since and hasn't been working or able to leave the house and be the busy body that she was before. Along with that, I have caught her looking at the scars in the mirror on her breasts and cry. Her mood has been different ever since and while hers isn't as severe as my father's, her depression has affected me as well.

A few months ago, my father's alcoholism caught up to him. His kidney function almost completely halted and now he lives with a catheter on at all times. He struggles to walk, stand up, and use the bathroom, and even get things from the fridge. I am clearly now the man of the house.

Despite these unfortunate things taking place in my life, I was able to persevere and still excel academically, maintaining a 4.0 GPA and becoming the salutatorian of my class. I have been able to push through the rough times and prove my resilience. I have participated in the Bruce Wells Upward Bound program, a Peer Mediation program, Youth Civics Union, and various basketball team. These activities along with my innate motivation and positive attitude have helped me grow in multiple characteristics such as communication, leadership, teamwork, problem solving, and reflecting.

To be specific, the Bruce Wells Upward Bound/TRIO program has benefitted my personal maturation in astronomical ways. Participating in tutoring sessions, summer programs, TRIO days, and college tours have given me an appreciation for many things that will help me become successful in the future. It has given me a strong understanding of how important networking is in the world and just how far you can get in life by knowing the correct people. Upward Bound constantly encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and meet new people, making bonds that may one day prove necessary. Their encouragement made me a more outgoing person and instilled confidence in me that wouldn't be there otherwise. The program also provided a meaningful ground for me to give back to my community. By forcing me to participate in community service, I was able to gain a fascination for helping others and making sure that community was as safe and as clean as it could possibly be. This intrigued me into joining other programs such as Peer Mediation in my school which helps students settle their issues in a non violent manner, and Youth Civics Union which strives to give students the support they need to vocalize their opinions and be involved in decisions that would directly affect them.

Aside from the educational benefits that Upward Bound has given me, being a part of that program has opened my eyes to places outside of Worcester and helped me build lasting relationships with people outside of my everyday life. It has allowed me to meet best friends, mentors, and someone who has basically become a second mother to all the students in our class with her undoubted care and never ending support, Gaelyn Hastings. Adam Shaughnessy practically held my hand and guided me through the common application and financial aid process. Without the program, I would know nothing about college and I would've missed out on meeting so many extraordinary people.

I am not sure what my future holds but I know that with my confident personality, motivation, and a business degree from UMass Amherst, I will make my family proud and live happily. I am interested in becoming a salesman and investing in real estate so I will venture into those realms and make a name for myself but a lot can change within the next four years of college so I am keeping an open mind.

With both my parents being unemployed, this scholarship will provide much needed assistance financially. I would utilize this scholarship to help pay for my future.

True Teh

Northfield Mount Hermon

Upward Bound

I was born in Mae Ra Moe refugee camp in Thailand. When I was thirteen I immigrated to United States with my three siblings and my parents. I joined Upward Bound to help me go college. With a better education I can have better life. Of my three siblings and parents, I will be the first person in my family to go to college. This scholarship will help me achieve my goals.

Conflict between different ethnic groups began in 1948 after the British left Burma. My parents decided to leave after conflict got worse and their village was raided. They fled to a refugee camp in 1994. I was born in Mae Ra Moe in the winter of 1998. The United Nations supported our refugee camp by giving us rice, salt, yellow split peas, oil, and coal, but as years passed the supplies were reduced due to the refugee increase in the camp. Our house was made of materials we could find around us. Our roof was made of leaves, the floor and walls were made of bamboo, and wood went under the earth to support the house. Because these materials were not very strong, our house needed to be repaired every two or three years. Usually the roof was replaced the most because it was damaged by the rains. The roof was also the most difficult to replace because we had to go out and pick up leaves. Sometimes it was hard to get leaves because so many people in the camp needed leaves to repair their homes too. My mother and I used to wake up at 3 A.M to pick up leaves. If we didn't go early in the morning, there would be no good leaves for us because others had gotten them first. My mother and I put our lives at risk to gather leaves. We had to climb on the side of a rocky mountain, rocks could fall above our heads, and the rocks were not really stable when we tried to hold on. We had to travel for an hour to reach the place and we had to use a flashlight to guide our way. Besides gathering necessary materials, going to school was also challenging in the refugee camp. My parents had to pay for school and because my parents are old it was hard for them to work and earn money, but they did sell vegetables from their garden to get money for our schooling. Because school was so expensive, my siblings and I worked hard in school. This is how it was for twelve years. My family struggled for twelve years. In 2010 my parents applied to come to the United States. After a year of waiting we were finally able to leave Mae Ra Moe.



I arrived in the United States on April 28, 2011 with the help of a refugee resettlement program. Adjusting to life in the United States was difficult. When I arrived, my family and I didn't know how to speak and understand English. It was difficult to learn English. When I was in school I didn't understand anything and just watched teachers while they were talking, it was very challenging. To overcome my challenges, I tried to watch and listen to music in English so I could pronounce words more correctly. I read books at my levels or a little higher and read out loud to hear my pronunciation. Reading books helped me with my comprehension and writing skill. It took me about two years to really learn English, but I was still afraid to speak because of my accent. When I needed help I couldn't speak up. I was always afraid that I would get things wrong in school but one of my teachers told me it's okay to make mistakes and this changed my feelings about my English and social skills. In 8th grade I had to start translating for my family. When bills and insurance forms come I need to translate them into Karen so my mother can understand. When I am not in school I help my mother go to the store, appointments, and to pick up her medicine. Because of these things I see myself as a leader in my family.

Since becoming more comfortable in speaking English, school became more fun for me. I started to be on honor roll and became a member of National Honor Society. I also started thinking about going to college. My teacher, Mrs. Marvel recommended me for the Upward Bound program and she helped me fill out the form because she knew that this program would help me go to college. Before I joined this program I only knew one way to be able to attend college and that was by getting a loan. Now I know that if I get good grades I can get scholarships and other financial aid to afford college. This program helped me be a better student and gave me the experience of what it was like to live on a college campus. As a student of Upward Bound, I am encouraged to volunteer in my community. I volunteer at the Action Centered Tutoring Service. I tutor an elementary student who struggles with his academic work. I help my student with his homework, reading, and math. It is a wonderful experience because of the relationships I have built with the students and staff. The program makes us feel like we are family members. Through this volunteer experience over the past two years, I have made a difference for my student. Upward Bound has also helped me think about my future goals. My goal is to become a chemistry researcher. I want to study chemistry when I am in college and I would like to do scientific research after I get my degree. My career goals are to develop medicine and to travel to other countries to do scientific research. I would like to expose myself to other cultures while doing my research and want to help others improve their health.

The MEOA scholarship would be very helpful because I have many financial issues. Nobody in my family is working. Both of my parents do not work and they will not be able to help me with my college expenses. My father is too old to work and my mother is not in good health to work. We rely on benefits like food stamps to support the five of us in my household. My parents don't speak English and it is difficult for them to become U.S. citizens. I will be looking for jobs in the summer to fill my financial gap and buy or rent books when I need to. My estimated family contribution is zero dollars. Westfield State University will meet eighty two percent of my need. The MEOA scholarship would help me with my college career. This scholarship will help me with many school fees like school supplies, books, housing, and transportation. This scholarship will give me an opportunity to focus on my subject and I won't need to worry as much about paying for college. It will make my college career go smoothly.

I have learned English and many other subjects and become a better student than I used to be. My next journey is to explore and experience college life. Upward Bound has helped me reach my goal of going to college. My parents will not be able to help me out, but I will find a way to finish college and continue to my next step. This scholarship will make achieving my goal become more realistic..